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P. CORDDRY, Charles

# Recent monitoring indicates U.S. won't miss bases in Iran

By CHARLES W. CORDDRY

Washington Bureau of The Sun

Washington—Last Thursday, in the first test this year of their largest intercontinental missile, the Russians fired an SS-18 from Tyuratam in the southwestern Soviet Union to an impact point in the Kamchatka Peninsula. With no help from Iranian spy sites, lost in the revolution in February, the United States identified the rocket and tracked the entire flight.

In a more sophisticated test last December 26, the Russians launched an SS-18 which apparently was capable of carrying up to 14 nuclear warheads—4 more than the impending Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty (SALT) would allow. Again, the U.S. got its data from sites other than those in Iran.

An obsession here with the loss of the Iranian monitoring stations has distracted attention from the many other American techniques for checking on Soviet military activities and compliance with SALT terms. SALT critics magnify the importance of the sites, which kept watch on the Tyuratam test center, while defenders tend to play down that importance.

A government obsession with secrecy at the same time largely blocks official discussion of details of satellite and ground-station monitoring of SALT. There has been no official disclosure of the December 26 and April 19 tracking. The administration hopes to persuade reluctant senators to back the SALT pact by showing secret information without making it public.

To watch what goes on in the Soviet Union, the United States blankets it with cameras and electronic detecting and listening devices. They are spotted at ground stations and carried in satellites orbiting the earth at altitudes of 100 to 22,300 miles. Those at the latter height rotate around the earth at the same speed as the earth turns on its axis. This makes them stationary over fixed areas in Russia.

The controversy about the Iranian sites centers on how much of an Achilles heel their loss is in the matter of detecting Soviet cheating on SALT. Did they give unique information? How long will it take to replace them?

Under pressure on the significance of the Iranian setback, Harold Brown, the Secretary of Defense, said last Tuesday

the United States could regain enough of the lost capability in about a year "to verify adequately" Soviet compliance with SALT limits. He was speaking specifically of limits on new missiles and modifications of existing types.

In a fuller elaboration the next day, Mr. Brown referred to the "wide variety of other monitoring systems." All things considered, he told CBS News, "I'm convinced that we're going to be able to verify a SALT agreement from the moment it is signed and ratified."

A centerpiece of the treaty is that it limits each side to one new type of intercontinental missile, carrying no more than 10 warheads. It further bans any increase in numbers of warheads carried by existing types, which means a limit of 10 in the case of the giant SS-18, though it could carry more.

Americans see this as a major achievement toward limiting the qualitative arms race. Knowing how many warheads they face in the Soviet force, they can know what measures must be taken to modernize the U.S. missile forces so that they cannot be knocked out.

Thus, detection of any Soviet circumvention of curbs on new or modified missiles is of first importance, and is what the debate on Iranian sites is mostly about.

The United States has two types of earth satellites for photographing Soviet missile activities.

One, nicknamed "Big Bird," is in an orbit of about 100 miles and carries six canisters that are used to return film to earth. As the canisters drop over the Pacific near Hawaii, they are snatched from the air by C-130 planes fitted with "skyhooks."

The other is known as the KH-11. It has an orbit of about 160 miles and, searching the Soviet landscape, returns pictures by means of radio transmission. The Central Intelligence Agency probably has changed the designation of this satellite since the technical manual fell into Soviet hands.

Ground operators can direct the satellites to zero in on any suspect areas.

Other satellites monitor Soviet ground radar from 300 miles, and the stationary spacecraft are designed to detect a Soviet missile attack at its start. It is believed stationary satellites will be fitted to monitor missile tests by 1983 or 1984.

Ground stations in Turkey, not as well

located as the ones lost in Iran, monitor early stages of a missile test, as they did in the December 26 and April 19 shots.

Radar, called Cobra Dane and located on Alaska's Shemya Island, counts the number of warhead vehicles on a missile as they re-enter the atmosphere at the end of a test flight. Ships at sea also can monitor re-entry.

The construction, testing and deployment of anything as complex as a new intercontinental missile system would be extremely hard to conceal from this array of sky and ground sentries.

Authorities concede, however, that it might be possible for the Soviet Union—acting at times when photo reconnaissance satellites were not crossing over—to move a new missile to Tyuratam, mount it on a launch pad and fire it on a test flight.

But electronic intelligence satellites would detect that there had been a launching of some kind. Checking the record of satellite photography and seeing they had no picture of the event, American intelligence officials would be suspicious enough to alert their superiors to the possibility of a violation—of a new type of missile or of a modification banned by the SALT pact. Otherwise, why did the Russians conceal the test?

What to do about that information then would become a matter for political judgment, as would many other possible Soviet actions during the treaty's life.

What was specifically lost with the Iranian sites was the ability to monitor certain data from the booster stage of a missile as it lifts off at Tyuratam.

This monitoring gave information on launch weight and nuclear payload weight. If the Russians converted their superior "throw weight" into more warheads than the treaty allowed, this would be detected at Shemya and by ships at sea.